Family Affairs in Birdland

By CHARLES HENRY DAINS

THEY came early that spring, but not so early that they surprised me, for I had been looking for them a number of days. I knew they had arrived, even before I left my bed, for I heard his song so bright and gay, just a challenge to spring, or rather to summer-time, to hasten along. I climbed out of bed, and threw open my window for a look, and there they were—she sitting demurely in her dress of brown on a near-by tree; he flitting from limb to limb and singing with his splendid power of song.

They came early, but it proved to be just a little too early for that season, and though they stood their ground, not a song did I hear him sing; just soft twitters of love passed between them as they flew from limb to limb during the day.

Within a week the storm was gone, and then there came a change. His song was sweet, and it came early each morning and from time to time through the day, even until his vesper song just before the sun went away for the night in the west. He sang, following her about, while she was busy entering a hole in a tree here, a hole there. I knew that family affairs for these two had commenced, though he was troubled but little with them.

What a pretty little couple they were, dressed in brown, each of them! I have not introduced them, so take the privilege just now—Mr. and Mrs. Wren just back from the southland with winter dress, ready for the spring and summer work, and now busy with home affairs, nest building.

I had placed a box on a pole, with a small hole in it, hoping they might choose this for a home. She often went in, but as often came out and away to prospect every hole in the trees round about. It took some days for her to decide just the place. He left the choice of a home to her, and sang every time she came from this place or that.

Finally, the choice was made, and I was pleased, for it was near my window. I knew that I was to have great pleasure in watching the work of two fine little people of birdland.

The choice was made, and now how earnestly she worked! He was not idle, but did not work with such vigor as did she. She brought threads and fine grass, and now and then a bit of soft wool or a downy feather. These she carried into the hole, and kept there. He brought bits of grass and thread. It was carried into the hole, but nearly always returned, and dropped to the ground. More time was spent by him in song, and since he could not sing and work, he must needs stop, throw back his head, lift up his voice, and oh, how sweet!

But one morning I noticed a commotion. She was twittering, and seemingly was scolding, and almost took hold of him in her rage. It looked as if she might be saying, "You, sir, are spending more time in song than is needful. More work and less song, for family affairs ought to be considered by you and that right earnestly."

He took the scolding without a chirp given in return, and for a time was earnest in seeking material for the home nest, but as almost every piece brought was rejected, he soon forgot the scolding, and was ready for song.

One morning after a little more than a week of work, she was absent. He sat very quiet and demure near the home place. Neither a word nor song from him, just quiet, and I said,

"Aha! I know what is now taking place. There will be a little egg up yonder soon."

Then she appeared and sat beside him, and his song commenced. It seemed to have a different ring now, perhaps only my fancy. They left soon, and I climbed up to look, and right there, just inside the hole, was a dainty little lined nest, and snugly resting in it one speckled little egg, just one. Did you ever see just one? Each morning found her missing, he sitting demurely by, so quiet until she appeared, and then his morning song would be sung.

On the sixth day she did not appear. He was not so quiet now. He flew back and forth, and brought, from time to time, some little morsel that he passed into the hole, from which a little twitter came back, that seemed to say,

"Thank you, sir."

He took time for song now, and it was so soft and sweet, a love song sung near the nest, a song that seemed full of hope, just as any prospective father might sing.

Then one morning I noticed an extra stir about the home place. He sang so loud and clear. He flew so eagerly away, and returned with something in his little bill, passed it inside, away to repeat the operation, and then to sing and sing and sing. Then next day they were side by side hard at work. So many trips were made, and so much passed into that little door of their home. I did so wish to climb up for a look. I knew what little bits of soft, downy things were inside, not very beautiful just now, only as they were beautiful in promise of what they would be. Busy were they all day, but his morning song was ever sung, and evening time found him not too weary for more song.

The days passed quickly, and I watched eagerly for a sight of the family of the two. And I was rewarded one day at noontime. The sun was shining brightly, and reached down through the leaves of the tree that held the home place, and there on a limb near the doorway of the home they sat—five little folks all dressed in brown, dressed just as father and mother bird, only these five were so small, just about the size of the end of my thumb. And above them sat a pair of parent birds. She was quietly watching them; he, singing with all his might, a love song and a father song all in one.

The Home of a Famous Humorist

(C) Keystone

The state of Connecticut has purchased this house of Mark Twain's, which will be kept as a shrine to his memory.

We Shall Grow Our Own Corks

THE Department of Agriculture will immediately enter upon the growing of small forests of cork trees in California and Arizona. Lands not adapted for fruits will be utilized. Agents for the department have selected thirteen spots in Southern California and eleven along the Mexican border. The trees will not come to a cork yielding age until at least 1935.

Seven varieties of cork oaks have been imported from Portugal, Spain and Algiers. The department's experimental growing of date palms, brought from Persia, Arabia and Morocco to settlements on the Colorado desert, between Palm Springs and the Imperial Valley, has had such wonderful success that the cork forest plan has been given unusual attention.

Indeed, the desultory growing of cork oaks already has succeeded in several localities in Southern California. In a park at Pomona, California, for instance, a cork tree from Portugal, two feet thick at the trunk, grows as fine a quality of cork as has been brought into the United States. At Riverside and at Redlands are cork trees from Spain equal to any in the world.

The Department of Agriculture will urge that forests of this species of oak be established in the arid lands of the border of the United States and Mexico.

Importations of cork into the United States now amount to more than $4,200,000 a year. Ten years ago they were about $2,000,000. Cork values have increased 72 per cent since 1910, and are still increasing in value. In Portugal cork forests of fifty acres were sold at the rate of $350 (in our money) in 1900. They have recently brought $800 an acre. Land suitable for cork forests, it is said, can be easily had in Southern California and Arizona for $15 an acre.

The soil of California is particularly well adapted to the cork oak, which grows there with greater rapidity than in Europe. Already about 1,000 of the trees have been planted in the San Gabriel Valley. The University of California has distributed several bushels of the acorns, which, by the way, are very good to eat.

The variety of uses to which cork is put is extraordinary. The Algerian uses cork to make boats, furniture, saddles, shoes, horseshoes and even clothing. It also is employed in Southern Europe in the making of roofing, pails, clothes, window lights, plates, tubs, drinking vessels, religious images, fences and coffins. The waste cork from the cutting of bottle stoppers is utilized for filling cushions and mattresses and in the manufacture of cork-dust bricks, which are serviceable where extreme dryness is required. A very fine kind of pasteboard is made from cork, the ground substance being mixed with paper pulp and pressed to squeeze out the water. Cork waste is also used for making lifeboats, buoys, linoleum, inner soles for shoes, artificial legs and arms, "cork concrete," and many other articles in which lightness and elasticity are required.

The ancient Greeks and Romans were familiar with many of the uses to which cork is put at the present time. They knew that the cork tree produced a new bark after the old had been detached. Employments for it were restricted, however, until the seventeenth century, when the development of glass manufacture and the widespread use of bottles made it a necessity. By the end of the eighteenth century the tree was largely cultivated; cork forests were rented, and workshops were established for the cutting of cork. The cultivation of the cork oak began in Spain and extended thence into Portugal and France. There are at present in the world 3,500,000 acres of cork forests, more than half of this area being in France, Algiers and Tunis. This does not include the forests of Morocco, which are still unexplored.

Bicycle handles, life preservers and hat linings are made of cork. The material is burned for making "Spanish black." The waste is utilized for lining ice houses, being an excellent non-conductor, and also for packing grapes. Notwithstanding all these uses for cork waste that have been mentioned, great quantities of it have been thrown away for lack of purpose to which to apply it. Cork dust is made to serve as a substitute for rice powder in the toilet. Tons of cork are manufactured every year into nose-holders for eyeglasses. For these the very finest quality is required. The inventor of this particular use for cork has made a big fortune out of the idea. He gets a royalty on every pair of eyeglasses thus made that is sold.

Even if the United States has gone dry, champagne corks consume the bulk of the finest cork that reaches the market. They cost four cents each against one cent, before the war. This is because they are cut by hand. Ordinary cork that is intended to be cut by machinery is first softened by steam so that it may not take the edges off the revolving knives. Cork thus treated does well enough for common purposes, but it has lost its elasticity and does not make stoppers tight enough for champagne.

The cutting of cork by hand is a trade, requiring skill and long experience. The knives employed are so quickly dulled that they have to be sharpened constantly by the cork-cutter as he works. The great champagne houses often engage the entire output of cork-cutting establishments in Spain and Portugal.

Agents from the factories and export firms of Seville and Lisbon go through the villages each year buying up enormous quantities of cut corks of all sizes and qualities. They are sorted in the cities and done up in bales for exportation. Corks vary so much in quality that the price runs all the way from four cents to $5 a gross. Much of the finest bark is turned into stoppers for medicine bottles.

Member of Hungarian Parliament

SHE was formerly a school-teacher, and for ten years member of the Catholic Social Mission Society, of Budapest, where she did social work excellently as a professional. She is between thirty-five and thirty-eight years old and has given her political party wonderful service, organizing, in the whole country, the Catholic women who were voting for the first time. By her work her party became the leading one, having the majority in the House. She is not only an excellent organizer, but also a clever speaker and parliamentarian.